**A Malignant Threat to National Security:  Reinvigorating the Air Force Core Values**

**SOS 14C Think Tank Group I**

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The profession of arms must be carried out with competence and character, and towards that end, the United States Air Force (USAF) created the Core Values. Recently, the USAF has experienced a number of publicized violations of this ethical code. The incidents, ranging from academic cheating to sex crimes, have cast doubt upon the competence and character of the USAF. This requires immediate consideration and sustained action.

To grapple with this issue, researchers analyzed several cases to identify common contributing factors that led groups of individuals to violate the Core Values. Cases included the nuclear missile test cheating scandal at Malmstrom AFB (2014), seven United States Air Force Academy (USAFA) cheating scandals (1965-2014), the Abu Ghraib prison abuse case (2003-2004), and two organizational sex scandals (USAFA 2003, Lackland AFB 2011). In each case, evidence suggested an environment that fostered drifts in organizational norms which led to actions disconnected from Core Values. These drifts fell into four general areas: projecting an image of perfection at all costs; tolerance to violations in pursuit of mission; inconsistent accountability; and, miscommunication of expectations and standards—all of which often interacted and added complexity. Ultimately, the climate fostered behaviors that in retrospect one recognizes as gross violations of Core Values; however, in the moment, Airmen viewed as acceptable or normal. To combat this, it is critical for leadership to realign organizational norms.

No single action will suffice to combat the ethical drift that has occurred in the Air Force. Sustained and committed efforts focusing across all domains (strategic, operational, and tactical) of leadership are required to realign the service's code of ethics within all Airmen:

*Strategic Course of Action: Perception Campaign* – Using media resources available within the organization, senior leaders will deliver focused messages across a variety of

platforms, with local leadership reinforcing the message through personal interaction with their Airmen. To combat misperceptions, messages should range from presenting facts on Core Value related topics, to disseminating positive and negative examples of ethical behavior by Airmen. This methodology has demonstrated success in the Sexual Assault Prevention media campaign.

*Operational Course of Action: "Clear the Air"* – This tool assesses the climate of a unit via an intrapersonal medium and combats the disconnect between Airmen and their leadership. Utilizing the privileged rights of the Chaplain Corps, this program would be executed by chaplains and their assistants, and could be initiated by commanders and/or their Airmen. Similar to both a Unit Climate Survey and Safety Investigation Board, the program will be non-attributable in nature, and will exist as a tool to provide commanders with a pulse of their unit.

*Tactical Course of Action: Peer Groups* –Inspired by the success of USAFE "Core Groups", this program empowers Airmen at all levels to discuss ethical quandaries, as well as to promote an environment that fosters problem solving at the lowest level. The Chaplain Corps would maintain a list of focus topics, developed at the Headquarters Air Force level, tailored at the local level, and addressed within small groups of rank appropriate peers on a regular basis.

This proposed course of action encapsulates strategic, operational, and tactical elements focusing on holistic, long-term programs to realign the USAF with its Core Values and improve the organizational climate in order to foster ethical behavior by all Airmen. Individual deficiencies will still occur. However, if the organization internalizes and actively promotes its values, it will produce a self-sustaining culture that truly exudes integrity, service, and excellence in all actions.

INTRODUCTION

The United States profession of arms is a pillar of American democracy and a guardian of its constitution. Entrusted by the people, the United States Air Force (USAF) is charged to carry out the duties of the nation with the utmost competence and character. To this end, the Air Force has a code of professional ethics known as the Core Values; these intend to "remind us of what it takes to get the mission done. They are the common bond among all comrades in arms, and they are the glue that unifies the force and ties us to the great warriors and public servants of the past" (USAF, 1997). Ethics are "the principles of conduct governing an individual or a profession." The Core Values are the embodiment of the Air Force's ethics, while morals, defined as "of or relating to principles or considerations of right and wrong action or good and bad character" (Webster's Third New International) are how we act in accordance with those values.

The USAF has recently seen incidents of unacceptable behaviors ranging from academic cheating to sex crimes, and some doubt whether the service has truly internalized its Core Values. While the Air Force is primarily composed of Airmen who adhere to the highest standards, these incidents require action in both the short and long term to ensure that the Air Force does not lose the trust of the nation.

Individuals with varied experiences, morals, and ethics enter and serve the USAF every day. To unite these Airmen under a common value system, and to combat undesirable behavior seen in the late 1990's, the USAF created the Core Values. (USAF, 1997) While developed in 1997 and prominently displayed throughout the Air Force, focus on the Core Values has waned over time, and the organizational culture of the USAF has shifted to permit wider disconnect between academic Core Value applications and realistic operations. Airmen adhere to the Core Values as a reflection of the strength of the organization's ethical culture.    When an

organization's culture drifts, permitting and, in some cases, promoting slight deviations in order to achieve desired metrics, the lines between "right" and "wrong" blur. Over time, these drifts result in new behavioral norms, where Core Value infractions are considered irrelevant or not even recognized. Recent events have supported the claims that the organizational culture of the USAF has drifted from its Core Value foundation. To examine and determine potential causes for this drift, multiple case studies were analyzed and common factors contributing to the ethical culture of the organization were identified.

- Nuclear missile test cheating scandal at Malmstrom AFB (2014)
- Seven United States Air Force Academy (USAFA) cheating scandals (1965-2014)
- Abu Ghraib prison abuse case (2003-2004)
- Two Air Force sex scandals (USAFA 2003, Lackland AFB 2011)

No single solution can quickly address the complex, environmental problem causing Core Value violations. In each aforementioned case, evidence suggested an organizational culture, in which there existed a disconnect between actions and stated principles. These disconnects often interacted to increase the problem's complexity and fell primarily within one or more of four areas:

- Projecting and image of perfection at all costs
- Tolerance to violations, in pursuit of objectives
- Inconsistent accountability
- Ambiguous Communication of Expectations and Standards

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The research question asked whether the United States Air Force had a systemic problem with Airmen violating its Core Values. Therefore, the researchers chose to utilize a qualitative research method to identify examples of large-scale scandals that involved multiple Airmen, versus those affecting one or two Airmen. The research goal was to identify common contributing factors that emerged as a direct result from the underlying Air Force environment or

culture.  The researchers approached the study with the assumption that the majority of Airmen who enter the Air Force are inherently good and initially accepted the values of integrity, service before self, and excellence.  Using these premises, researchers initially analyzed the following case studies:

- Squadron Officer School (SOS) plagiarism
- United States Air Force Academy (USAFA) cheating scandals
- Abu Ghraib prisoner abuse scandal
- Malmstrom cheating scandal
- Tailhook sex assault scandal
- USAFA sex scandal (2003)
- Military Training Instructors (MTI) sex scandal at Lackland AFB, TX (2012)
- USAF tanker scandal (2003)
 (For the complete background and findings for each case, reference the Appendix)

Researchers analyzed the causal factors to determine commonalities.  After a thorough analysis of these case studies, the authors chose to eliminate those with violations occurring in an isolated setting, which researchers could not attribute to the overall Air Force environment.  These isolated incidents included SOS plagiarism and USAFA drug use.  Researchers identified examples containing contributing factors present in three or more cases for further analysis.  This method proved useful because it eliminated case-specific factors and helped identify those common factors that a fiscally restricted corrective program could target.  From this analysis, the authors found four main contributing factors: 1). Need for perfection; 2). Tolerance; 3). Lack of accountability; and, 4). Communication failure.  Further analysis sought the root problem of each factor, from which corrective methods appeared to reduce future cultural drifts.

CONTRIBUTING FACTORS

*Projecting an image of perfection at all costs*

Successful military operations require excellence from all involved—lives depend on it—yet, if an organization excessively values an image of perfection, actual quality may suffer. Case studies revealed that the Air Force environment exudes an image of perfection to such a degree that one feels compelled to violate Core Values. Even in training scenarios, this stringent pressure applied evenly to mundane and critical situations. The Commander Directed Investigation (CDI) at Malmstrom AFB revealed a culture in which the drive to demonstrate perfection took precedence over effective training and personnel development. There is no doubt that the nuclear enterprise must perfectly control such powerful weapons. However, the leadership's emphasis favored presenting metrics on a quantitative, operationally irrelevant test rather than qualitative performance in the field. Those who prioritized operationally relevant tasks over irrelevant ones faced a misplaced reprisal. This frustrated the missileers and resulted in an "us-vs-them" mentality, in which the missile crews felt compelled to aid one-another in testing to satisfy leadership pressures (Holmes 2014). Furthermore, though the Air Force required a 90% passing score, squadron leadership unofficially mandated scores of 100% (Holmes 2014). The emphasis on reporting perfection to superiors encouraged the leadership to reward individuals based on this erroneous metric. Every system is perfectly designed to get the results it gets. In the example of Malmstrom, leaders set up the system to achieve perfect test scores, regardless of the cost. This misplaced effort for perfection subsequently controlled both morale and career progression (Holmes 2014). The over emphasis on this image of perfection produced a corruptive environment that drifted norms. Tests constructed without regard to training value or career competency directly contributed to willingness by missileers to cooperate on test evaluations or tolerate deviations.

*Tolerance in Pursuit of Objectives*

Deviation from appropriate behavior can occur for a variety of reasons; however, very few people spontaneously decide to commit blatantly immoral acts. Deviant behavior often begins with one's self-tolerating the behavior in others (Fredricks, 2011). The cases studied revealed various forms of toleration: lack of personal conviction, misplaced loyalty to one's career over the institution, and acceptance of behavior as socially acceptable (i.e. "this is how it's *really* done"). Regardless of the individual's original motivation, the organizational culture allowed for Airmen to descend the bystander continuum, moving from "innocent bystander" to "guilty perpetrator" in an environment where the ends justified the means (Fredricks 2011).

All USAFA cadets receive 25 hours of training annually on the USAF honor code and ethics; yet, studies suggested a wide discrepancy between the cadets' understanding of and practice of the honor code. Anonymous exit surveys administered to 747 former cadets at the USAFA from 2002 to 2011 revealed that over 62% of the responding cadets had knowledge of honor violations, yet fewer than 9% actually reported these violations (Malmstrom & Mullins, 2013). The survey also showed that individual violations strongly correlated with their toleration of honor code violations: "…adherence to the Honor Code is more difficult when cadets perceive dishonesty around them…it becomes a matter of evening the score – you are not cheating, you're restoring fairness" (Malmstrom & Mullins, 2013). The USAFA cadets were not moral miscreants, but succumbed to the dilemma of trying to succeed in a culture that tolerated this behavior in order to succeed. This environment of toleration is not limited to cheating on examinations. In one report, Maj. York noted that "lights out" at the USAFA was at 2300 hours; yet, to succeed, students were encouraged to work beyond this time (York, 2007). These two examples, demonstrated both individual toleration and direct encouragement by other USAF

members to act outside of the Core Values. This behavior established an AF environment responsible for teaching future leaders that violations of the rules were acceptable if it produced results in a time prohibitive environment.

A similar tolerant culture was evident in the Malmstrom AFB scandal. Within the organizational climate shaped by the aforementioned *perfection image,* a mentality evolved that the ends justified the means. The Malmstrom missileer community had an unstated expectation that cooperation would be tolerated in order to produce high test averages. The distinction between helping another missileer and cheating became blurred and culminated in 79 operators either compromising the test or tolerating it when others did (Holmes, 2014). As test cooperation became mainstream, the problem became an institutional one. One research study captured this human behavior citing "individuals who observed others cheating were significantly more likely to subsequently cheat" (Bunn, Caudill, & Gropper, 1992). The missileers revealed that though they felt collaboration was something they "wouldn't normally do," a "culture of compromises" existed that encouraged each individual to rationalize the behavior as acceptable (Holmes, 2014).

Tolerance of unacceptable behavior was also at the crux of recent Air Force sexual-assault scandals. The Defense Task Force on Sexual Assault in the Military Services cited "toleration of sexual misconduct by the cadet corps" and a "failure to intervene" as primary factors that led to persistent recurrence of sexual assaults (2005). This study suggested that peer loyalty superseded the obligation to correct the improper behavior (Report of the Defense Task Force, 2005). Peer loyalty is usually beneficial and builds strong camaraderie; however, it may have inappropriately dominated over the responsibility to intervene in cases of sexual violence (Report of the Defense Task Force, 2005). In this case, the organizational culture did not

properly prioritize the value placed on peer loyalty and loyalty to the Core Values. It tolerated inappropriate sexual behavior, which led to a degradation of mission readiness.

This normalization of toleration within an institution is exceptionally dangerous. Individual toleration of these behaviors is an individual failure, but when widespread instances of toleration exist, it becomes an institutional problem. A study, conducted by Mazar and Ariely, indicated that if one believes that committing a dishonest act will still allow a self-concept of general honesty, the likelihood one rationalizes the act increases (2006). When one fails to intervene, one not only fails to prevent a violation, but also encourages more of them. Knowing and speaking the Core Values is worthless if one does not adhere to them.


*Inconsistent & Ineffective Accountability*

Humans are not perfect, and much can be learned from mistakes. However, in order to avoid repeating the same mistakes, individuals must identify misconduct and correct it in a timely manner. In the following case studies, corrective action by supervisors demonstrated either inconsistency or absenteeism prior to each situation becoming a public scandal. In the wake of the Malmstrom cheating scandal, the CDI conducted a survey of 20th AF CGO missileers. Over 30% of the respondents "completely agreed" that their squadron leaders were aware of "improper behaviors within the unit," and focus groups revealed that CGOs perceived "a leadership that is aware of what is going on and tolerates it" (Holmes, 2014). This evidence indicated deviant practices had leader's tacit approval, and despite personal reservations, some CGOs collaborated on tests because of an apparent leader endorsement (Holmes 2014).

The diminishing emphasis by leaders on accountability illustrates one of the contributing factors for repeated USAFA cheating offenses. Disciplinary actions for similar incidents

decreased in severity over several similar cheating scandals over the decades since the inception of the USAFA (Philipps, 2014). In 1965, a cheating scandal led to the expulsion of 111 cadets of 115 involved, while in 2012, a very similar case led to 70 cadet reprimands, but fewer than 10 expulsions from the USAFA (Philipps, 2014). Examining the metrics alone, the disciplinary actions taken against the honor code violations at the USAFA have lessened in severity since 1965, signaling a degree of decreased leader emphasis on integrity in academics to some members. This in turn, can lead some to deviate from accepted moral/ethical norms.

One can also see this shift in accountability in the recent Air Force sex scandals. In 2011, over 20 Military Training Instructors (MTI) at Lackland AFB, TX were accused of sexual assault or sexual misbehavior with trainees. A congressional investigation revealed that "insufficient leadership oversight" and "poor accountability" led to a permissive environment where sexual misconduct became more probable (United States Congress, 2012). Supervisors and commanders did not notice indicators, and their punitive actions were not widespread or effective enough to prevent recurrences across the organization. The perception of ineffective or inconsistent accountability also exists. In 2008, roughly 10% of reported sex assaults were brought to court-martial, and among those, 62% received non-judicial punishments or administrative actions and discharges "so mild they amounted to a mere slap on the wrist," said Professor Helen Benedict to the United States Congress (2013). The fact that just over 1 in 10 sexual assault cases were heard at a court-martial is indicative of the military as an institution (United States Congress, 2013). Overall, Airmen do not believe they will be caught for wrong behavior nor will have to face consequences. The absence of fear for getting caught may lead some to violate Core Values.

For behavior to improve, the organization must clearly state that violations of the Core Values will be punished and follow through with an appropriate response. When examining dishonest behavior, studies have found that increasing the probability of detection offers more deterrence than the severity of the punishment itself (Mazar & Ariely, 2006). Generally, the perception of inconsistent accountability leads to a perception that the behavior will not be detected or that the punishment will be lenient enough to offset the risk of dishonest acts. Leaders will effectively reduce deviations through early detection, holding members at all grades responsible for their actions, and ensure sufficient publicity of disciplinary action to address misperceptions.

*Ambiguous Communication of Expectations & Standards*

The Abu Ghraib prison torture case demonstrates the ramifications when leaders poorly communicate expectations and standards in an operational environment. When expectations are unclear, social norms can rapidly shift from those of a professional military organization to those of the untrained masses. In the case at Abu Ghraib, several factors led to multiple failures that resulted in human rights violations by US personnel against detainees.

Leadership did not provide the 800th Military Police Brigade specialized training in how to conduct detainee operations or interrogations. While generally familiar with the Geneva Conventions, they lacked specific guidance on standard operating procedures. According to Major General Atonio Taguba, the head of one investigation, this issue was compounded by a lack of guidance from the commanding general for the detention facilities in Iraq—Brigadier General Janis Karpinski. General Karpinski did not "[attempt] to remind 800th MP Soldiers of the requirements of the Geneva Conventions regarding detainee treatment or [take] any steps to

ensure that such abuse was not repeated" (Zimmerman, 2004, 12). General Taguba's investigation revealed "no clear emphasis by BG Karpinski to ensure that the 800th MP Brigade staff, commanders, and soldiers were trained to standards in detainee operations and proficiency or that serious accountability lapses that occurred over a significant period of time, particularly at Abu Ghraib… were corrected" (Zimmerman, 2004, 27). Abu Ghraib demonstrates how easily a breakdown can occur without clearly defined expectations. While this does not excuse individual violations of human rights without leadership's guidance, these troops were much more likely to be swayed by groupthink and conduct poorly informed operations. Furthermore, without an immediate correction to reinforce standards, the troops may assume that their behavior is, in fact, in line with the expectations of their commanders.

In the Abu Ghraib case, senior level officers did not commit abuse. However, "they did bear responsibility for lack of oversight of the facility, failing to respond in a timely manner to the reports from the International Committee of the Red Cross and for issuing policy memos that failed to provide clear, consistent guidance for execution at the tactical level" (Jones, 2004). A lack of clear guidance led to confusion about authorized interrogation techniques and led to "the occurrence of some of the non-violent and non-sexual abuses" (Jones, 2004). He continued, "Abuses would not have occurred had doctrine been followed and mission training conducted" (Jones, 2004).

Cases of poorly reinforced expectations exist within the Air Force as well. In the USAFA sexual assault cases, the Report of the Defense Task Force found that some male cadets did not value females equally because of differing standards (2005). As a result, sexual harassment and assaults were more likely to occur. Academy culture was found to "diminish the

regard given to women" (Report of the Defense Task Force, 2005, p. 8). This was a direct result of a lack of clear guidance by senior leaders.

The Report of the Defense Task Force tasked to investigate the USAFA sexual assault incident found that the role of women had been "inadequately understood and addressed" (2005, p. 22). This led to attitudes that permitted a hostile environment to develop. Without a clear understanding of male cadets' responsibility to incorporate women into the service academies, cadets failed to uphold basic standards of dignity and respect (Report of the Defense Task Force, 2005). While this was an incredibly complex issue, the lack of clearly defined objectives in incorporating females into academy culture greatly contributed to increased hostilities and criminal behavior.

The abuses at Abu Ghraib and the service academies provide extreme examples of how a lack of guidance and oversight can lead to grossly deviant behaviors. With similar lack of guidance, these failures could occur in any organization. Without effective initial communication of standards, efforts at ensuring accountability have diminishing returns. Service members must know the standard, to which all adhere.

<div align="center">RECOMMENDATIONS</div>

The aforementioned contributing factors indicated a failure by Airmen to abide by Air Force Core Values; yet, a drift in organizational culture caused that failure. The solution and problem is leadership, which continues to have increasing importance in a restrictive environment with less time and fewer resources. Leadership, in this sense, reflects both within the military structure and at the personal level required to stand up for what is right within a misguided organization. The intent of the following suggested course of action is to empower

Airmen at all levels to effect organizational change by defining standards; ensuring accountability; maintaining and focusing on operational relevance; and, stamping out toleration for deviations. Some may believe that by instituting a morality test at recruitment we can prevent these issues; however, none of the case studies noted an inherently immoral population as a contributing factor. Instead, the contributing factors revolved around an organizational structure and behaviors that accepted or promoted aberrant behavior. To combat these factors, the Air Force must institute programs that promote its professional code of values.

*Course of Action Element 1: Perception Campaign*

Every Airman must hear, directly from one's commander, supervisor, and peers, that the Core Values are the foundation for the service. The aforementioned case studies indicate that without clearly defined responsibilities, Airmen will have difficulty adhering to the Core Values. General Mark Welsh disseminated his memorandum outlining his expectations, and under this program, the first step is for every squadron commander to define clearly his or her own expectations. With a proposed seven-day suspense, commanders should directly address his or her organization face-to-face (either recorded or in person). Squadron leadership by e-mail is not acceptable in matters of such importance—and forwarding emails from senior leaders does not replicate the value of a face-to-face address. Thereafter, the MAJCOM commander would survey random Airmen at all ranks to ensure that this communication occurred.

To support this first step and demonstrate commitment, the Air Force would launch a massive media campaign. Various platforms (e.g. websites, videos from senior leaders, AFN commercials, etc.) would be utilized to articulate expectations, reinforce standards, and highlight the consequences of deviant behavior. This parallel effort will strengthen the message across the

rank structure by emphasizing the USAF has a problem and by highlighting specific behaviors—both good and bad. In doing so, the Air Force, as an institution, can begin the process of reinvigorating the Core Values within each organization and each Airman.

Leadership should make the consequences of Core Value violations public, in accordance with all legal requirements on confidentiality. By doing so, leadership will reinforce the seriousness of these deviations and stress the consequences of such behavior. Ideally, commanders would provide this information by speaking directly to their subordinates on at least a monthly basis. If face-to-face dissemination is not possible, commanders should offer Airmen with a brief outlining disciplinary action throughout their wing and/or MAJCOM indicating ranks, to include those in leadership positions. As highlighting negative behavior alone could lead to the spread of pessimism, the campaign would also offer positive examples of behavior by recognizing Airmen who uphold Core Values. This is an equally important element, as doing so shows indications of progress and will reinforce the perception that the Air Force is changing for the better.

The Air Force used similar elements of this perception campaign during the Air Force's struggle to combat sexual assault. While senior leaders still recognize the enormous challenges in this area, one can recognize the considerable gains that have improved awareness of the issue. This awareness campaign includes identifying factors that lead to the incidents and educating Airman about their options in the event of an incident (Defense Manpower Data Center, 2012). Behavioral studies suggest that use of the media can have a positive effect by deterring others from engaging in inappropriate behavior. Workman and Gathegi's study of ethics and punishment as dissuasive measures found that both punishment and ethics training can be effective in preventing unethical acts (2007). They found that there are two types of people: 1).

those who follow rules to avoid punishment or negative consequences and are more likely to be deterred by punishment than by ethics training; and, 2). those people who follow the rules out of social conformity and are more likely to be deterred with ethics training (Workman and Gathegi, 2007). As noted in the contributing factors discussion, Mazar and Arielly found that when the threat of being detected and punished for a transgression is viewed as highly probable, a potential offender is less likely to commit a deviant act (2006). This behavioral modification was seen in action after the public punishments of those involved in the Lackland MTI incident. Since 2012, there have been no new reports of MTI misconduct (Air Force Times, 2014). This strategic approach is strengthened by an operational level element focused on providing feedback to the local commanders.

*Course of Action Element 2: "Clear the Air" Program*

In the contributing factors discussion, research identified cases in which the commander failed to take action in a timely manner and cases in which subordinates knew of a problem, but were unable or unwilling to communicate this to their leaders. While many of these instances were not intentional, the Air Force must also consider the possibility that leaders will permit a culture of dishonesty to develop unchecked when it facilitates other preferential goals.

To address these high-risk cases, the Air Force should establish a program through the Chaplain Corps' office that would permit an in-person assessment of a unit's climate with a specific emphasis on the Core Values. This neither advocates morality inspections nor promotes a religious affiliation—religiously unaffiliated chaplain assistants would provide support as needed. The purpose of using chaplains and chaplains' assistants is to leverage the existing organization, who already operates outside the chain of command, as well as have non-

attribution and non-disclosure guaranteed by AFI 52-101, Section 3.2.5. Creating or utilizing an organization within the chain of command would call in to question the non-attribution element so critical for this program's success. All service-members would be educated on the program through the perception campaign and small group discussions. Commanders and subordinate Airmen would have the authority to anonymously request a "Clear the Air" team visit an organization.

In action, this tool would resemble an in-person climate assessment survey in an attribution-free setting. After the assessment, the chaplain's assistant would produce a final assessment with broad feedback to the unit commander. All information would remain anonymous, protecting individual Airman. With this honest feedback, the commander would learn if a unit had any problems. The intent here is a proactive program that identified trends before they became large-scale problems or scandals. By conducting interviews with small groups and individuals, these teams could determine disconnects between the Core Values, leadership, leadership's communications, and the unit. This approach provides significant advantages over the climate assessment survey because 1). It is non-attributional; 2). It allows for detailed and tailored assessment of areas at risk; and, 3). It allows for an outside perspective.

The provision of non-attribution is critical to the success of this program. In order to encourage frank discussion of potential violations, the teams must be able to pose questions that may address misconduct, with the expectation of honest answers. A conceptually similar program already in use is the Air Force Flying Safety program. Safety privilege protects those who identify unsafe operations in an effort to reduce the loss of aircraft and aircrew. It has consistently proven effective in rapidly determining the cause of accidents and preventing further accidents by allowing aircrew to identify concerns without fear of repercussions. However, after

an aircraft incident, a commander always has the authority to convene an Accident Investigation

Board (AIB) or CDI that operate independently of safety investigations (AF/SEF, 2008).

The "Clear the Air" program has the potential to identify risk factors before they become

dangerous or institutionalized breaches of the Core Values.  The focus groups conducted across

the 20th Air Force after the Malmstrom cheating incident revealed key risk factors at other

ICBM bases that must be corrected by adjusting the organizational culture (Holmes, 2014).

Investigators discovered this information because an outside source made an effort to seek those

trends.  By implementing this program, the Air Force provides another tool to empower Airmen

and commanders. Through this empowerment, senior leaders can measure and adjust the effects

of the Air Force-wide perception campaign and tailor the tactical level, core groups.


*Course of Action Element 3: Peer Group Mentorship (Inspired by USAFE "Core Groups")*

The intent of this program is to both empower Airmen at all levels to identify problem

areas and to allow commanders to determine whether their Airmen have effectively received

their directives.  This program would require small (6-8 person) groups of rank appropriate peers

to meet on a monthly basis to discuss a curriculum that senior leaders broadly develop and wing

leadership tailor.  The Chaplain Corps, including chaplain assistants with no religious faith,

would maintain and disseminate the curriculum based on inputs from leaders within the chain of

command.  The Chaplain Corps would also maintain lessons learned to disseminate as well.

Peer group mentorship meetings would be staggered to minimize operational effects on the unit.

For leaders, this could include vignettes of organizations or individuals with issues relating to the

Core Values.  For lower ranking Airmen, this could include "let's say you find yourself here…"

discussions. In either case, Airmen would exercise decision-making skills to arrive at a solution consistent with AF professional values.

Additionally, these discussions will gauge the effectiveness of leadership's message regarding the Core Values and generating a "pulse of the unit" as the Core Values relate to mission execution. As evidenced in the Malmstrom cheating scandal, the USAFA cheating scandals, and the Lackland sexual assault scandals, the disconnect between leaders's vision and the reality of daily operations created specific environments, in which the perception of acceptable behavior at the lowest levels differed significantly from standards. Providing personal mentorship via this "Core Group" platform would provide a more personal delivery of the commander's message. In this environment, one empowers Airmen by encouraging them to "tell it how it is," and commanders could use this information to reorient the unit based on problem areas.

Similar concepts proved successful in enhancing sexual assault awareness. During a USAFA research study in 2013, one male cadet described the value of small focus group sessions when discussing sex assaults—"you're able to talk and hear what other people are thinking, and it makes you actually think about the topic more than just sitting there and letting the words of the [SAPR] briefer wash over you" (Cook, 2013). His statement is closely grounded in research which indicates that groups with high levels of cohesiveness are highly effective in ensuring members conform to group norms (Festinger & Thibault, 1951). These social pressures can affect individual perceptions and encourage positive social change (Mabry & Barnes, 1980). By leveraging these behavioral concepts, the Air Force can efficiently influence organizational change and build upon the perception campaign and "Clear the Air" program.

CONCLUSION

The case studies identified factors contributing to the breakdown of the Core Values within the Air Force. This proposed course of action consisting of three intertwined beneficial elements focus on long-term programs to strengthen the health of Airmen as defined by the Core Values. Airmen will experience individual failings; however, if the Air Force truly internalizes the Core Values, it will produce a self-sustaining organizational culture grounded in its professional values. Only by doing so will it recruit the best individuals, produce the best-trained Airmen, and provide the American people with a force that holds itself to the highest standard.

CASE:  Cheating at Squadron Officer School

BACKGROUND:  Think Tank Group 1 decided to conduct research into plagiarism that occurred at Squadron Officer School. Current literature does not exist specifically addressing this issue, so we resorted to conducting two interviews at Maxwell AFB with Lt Col Kate Nelson, 29th Student Squadron Commander, and Lt Col Jonathan Rossow, Squadron Officer College Operations Director. Lt Col Rossow is the appointing official in plagiarism cases and sees all the facts of the cases. Lt Col Nelson has acted as an investigating officer in a number of plagiarism cases, and has developed the case against officers accused of cheating. The results of these investigations range from finding that no plagiarism occurred, derogatory comments on the offenders training report, to dismissal from the course entirely.

IDENTIFIED CAUSAL FACTORS:
- Fear of failure and the belief that sometimes success takes extreme measures.
- Untested personal accountability
- Poor time-management skills

RATIONALE:  Based on the fact that these individuals come from widely disparate career fields and communities, the relatively low numbers of iterations (8 per 4,000 students or 0.2%), and the lack of any coordinated collusion, researchers did not believe the cases warranted inclusion in this study.  It simply did not have enough commonalities with the topic of addressing cultural based Core Value deviations at an organizational level.

CASE: United States Air Force Academy Cheating Scandals (1965 – 2014)

BACKGROUND: The United States Air Force Academy formally adopted the Honor Code in 1956, which states, "We will not lie, steal or cheat, nor tolerate among us anyone who does" (USAFA, 2009). Yet, starting with the first public academic cheating scandal in 1956, the Air Force Academy has witnessed numerous cheating scandals, involving a large number of cadets engaging in or tolerating the Honor Code violations (i.e. selling answers to a math exam, loading answers onto laptops, plagiarizing chemistry lap reports, etc.). A study conducted by Fred Malmstrom (USAFA alumni, 1964) surveyed almost 50 years of Academy graduates, and showed a steady increase in proportion of cadets admitting to violating the Honor Code, from 28% in 1962 to 65% in 2010 (Philipps, 2014).

IDENTIFIED CAUSAL FACTORS (Malmstrom & Mullins, 2014):
- Toleration by peers: formal anonymous exit surveys administered to 747 former cadets from 2002 to 2011 showed that 62% of participants admitted tolerating other cadets violating the honor code at least once. Only less than 9% actually reported the violations.
- The survey showed that toleration of others' honor violations had strong correlations with one's own admitted academic violations.
- Inability to apply training: all cadets receive 25 hours of formal annual training in the applications of the honor code and ethics. According to the study, 248 out of 747 cadets admitted they had wanted to, but did not report other's dishonest behaviors. This can suggest either ineffective training, lack of personal conviction, or greater loyalty to peers than the institutional honor code.

RATIONALE: This case study is important to examine for multiple reasons. First, as one of the main officer commissioning source, many of these cadets will become leaders within the Air Force and influence its culture. Second, the high-stress, rigorous academic environment can be a representation of other Air Force training environments. Examining the contributing factors at the Academy may help explain other Air Force wide honor code violations.

CASE: Torture and Human Rights Violations at Baghdad Central Confinement Facility (aka Abu Ghraib), 2003-2004

BACKGROUND: Several factors led to multiple failures resulting in human rights violations at the Baghdad Central Confinement Facility (BCCF), also known as Abu Ghraib. On 13 Jan 2004, Specialist Joseph Darby reported the violations to the United States Army's Criminal Investigation Command. Approximately four months later, the photos and videos were made public by American news outlets. Ultimately, there were multiple investigations into the results and contributing factors that coalesced at BCCF. This case study illustrates how damaging the effect of poor communication of expectations and standards can lead to gross negligence and dramatically affect foreign and domestic perception of moral and ethical violations by the U.S. military.

IDENTIFIED CAUSAL FACTORS (Taguba, 2004):
- *Lack of Training*
- No reinforcement of standards
- *Lack of clear standards and expectations*
- *Failure in leadership* helped create an environment accepting of torture and abuse
- *Failure to intervene*
- Mission Accomplishment overrides the obligation to correct improper behavior
- Power is correlated with abuse

RATIONALE: From this case study, toleration, inconsistent accountability, failure in leadership, lack of training, and a lack of oversight were extrapolated as the key factors for Core Value violations of the 800th Military Police Brigade.

CASE: Malmstrom AFB Missileer Cheating: 2014 Investigation

BACKGROUND: This investigation began as a result of evidence of test compromise discovered during an unrelated drug investigation. The means of compromise was primarily via distribution in text messages. Ninety-eight officers were investigated for cheating; seventy-nine of eighty-eight were included in a CDI with 10 investigations retained by OSI due to potential release of classified material. Of the eighty-eight investigated through the CDI, allegations were substantiated against seventy-nine. In cases that were substantiated, members sent, received, or solicited test material or were aware of the cheating but did nothing to stop it.

IDENTIFIED CAUSAL FACTORS (Holmes, 2014):
- *"Zero Defect Culture"*
- HHQ Emphasis on external inspections leading to lack of self-identification and correction of errors
- "Oppressive oversight, inspection, and testing"
- Ineffective "leadership and mentoring" due to squadron manning structure
- "Perverse incentive structure"
- "Lack of clear guidance" on academic procedures

RATIONALE: This case study should be included to determine common contributing factors because it meets the criteria of addressing widespread deviations from the Core Values, rather than isolated instances of dishonesty.

CASE: The Tailhook Scandal of 1991

BACKGROUND: The "Tailhook Scandal" was the collection of series of events that occurred at the 35th Annual Tailhook Association, in Las Vegas, NV in September of 1991, in which 83 women and 7 men were assaulted in three days. Significant reports of sexual assault, indecent exposure, conduct unbecoming an officer, dereliction of duty, and false official statements caused two separate investigations to be conducted.  One, was at the behest of the US Navy after the media and Congress were notified of an official complaint lodged by Lt Paula Coughlin. The second materialized after the determination was made that a full investigation was not done.  The conclusions of the second investigation resulted in the career ending punishments of over 300 naval aviators, including 19 Admirals.

IDENTIFIED CAUSAL FACTORS (Vander Schaff, 1993):
- Permissive party-like atmosphere (Las Vegas Hilton Hotel)
- Atmosphere developed over a period of years
- Substantial access to alcohol
- "Tailhook brought to light the fact that we had an institutional problem with women," – Admiral Kelso, Chief of Naval Operations
- Belief by younger officers that the Navy condoned the excesses
- Senior leaders (both military and civilian) were aware of infractions, but did little to nothing to correct, thus implicitly condoning.

RATIONALE:  This case should not be used to demonstrate the wide-spread deviations from the USAF Core Values. While a couple of the causal factors were similar to the selected cases, the limited scope under which these events occurred indicate poor moral judgment aggravated by alcohol.  This case was a failure of morals and leadership, not a drift of core professional ethics.

CASE: Sexual Assaults at the United States Air Force Academy, 2003

BACKGROUND: In 2003, after an anonymous e-mail was sent to Senior Air Force leaders alleging there was a significant sexual assault problem at the United States Air Force Academy, the Secretary of the Air Force directed an investigation be opened to address the cadet complaints of sexual assaults. A final report found a high rate of women who were victims of rape, sexual assault, harassment, or attempts thereof. As a result of the sex assault scandal, the Air Force created numerous new programs and offices to combat these crimes. Over the years, congress continued to show interest in the USAFA's attempts to decrease the high number of sexual assaults and published multiple reports and findings regarding the USAFA culture. From these Congressional and Department of Defense (DoD) reports, multiple factors were cited as contributing to the high number of sexual assaults.

IDENTIFIED CAUSAL FACTORS (Defense, 2005):
- *Tolerated* the behavior and *tolerance* of the problem
- Cadets *did not assume responsibility for holding each other accountable* to live up to the required standards
- Offenders were *not consistently or effectively held accountable* through the criminal justice system
- *Failure in leadership* helped create an environment accepting of sexual assault
- *Failure to intervene*
- Nearly half of cadets would violate significant academy rules if they had *no fear of getting caught*
- *Peer loyalty* overrides the obligation to correct improper behavior
- Females held to different standards
- Clash between the youth culture and military structure
- High value was placed on resolving the problem at the lowest level
- Alcohol
- Historically, sexual assault and harassment were inadequately addressed
- Inappropriate actions toward women
- Power is correlated with abuse

RATIONALE: From this case study, toleration, inconsistent accountability, failure in leadership, and peer loyalty were extrapolated as the key factors for Core Value violations among the USAFA cadets.

CASE: Military Training Instructor Sexual Assault at Lackland AFB, TX

BACKGROUND: In 2011, multiple allegations of Military Training Instructors (MTIs) sexual misconduct towards military trainees and technical training students at Lackland AFB, TX. The allegations ranged from violations of Air Force policy to crimes of sexual assault. There were over 60 victims and over 20 former MTs charged with violations. In addition to the formal criminal investigation by the Air Force Office of Special Investigation, Congress investigated the scandal and published its findings.

IDENTIFIED CAUSAL FACTORS (United States Congress, 2013):
- *Insufficient leadership* oversight
- *Leadership* did not detect and prevent weaknesses
- *Poor accountability*; not held accountable for the behavior
- Shortcomings in prosecuting sexual assault cases within the criminal justice system
- *No fear* of getting caught
- *Inconsistent punishment*
- *Ineffective deterrence* because there was not a high degree of confidence of being detected or immediate punishment for wrong behavior
- *Instructors did not sufficiently police themselves* (tolerated behavior)
- Females held to different standards and segregation of training harmed the environment
- Inadequate number of female MTIs
- Insufficient instructor to student ratio; too much work for too few people
- Rank of instructors was too low and resulted in immature and inexperienced Airmen selected as MTIs
- Non-volunteer assignment
- Power of MTIs over trainees is perceived as absolute
- Trainees must do as they are told environment
- MTI training and development culture did not emphasize non-commissioned officer responsibilities adequately

RATIONALE: From this case study, toleration, poor accountability, and insufficient leadership were extrapolated as the key factors for Core Value violations among the USAFA cadets.

CASE: 2003 USAF Tanker Scandal

BACKGROUND:  The acquisition process surrounding the Air Force's newest tanker was significantly flawed.  A DoD Inspector General report in 2005 found that the process suffered from improper application of acquisition practices and that individuals failed to gather appropriate data regarding the requirements for a new tanker. This led to the proposal of a lease without adequate consideration of other options, which could have significantly decreased the cost to the tax-payer and possibly increased the effectiveness of the acquisitions process.  The misconduct occurred at the highest levels within the Air Force structure.

IDENTIFIED CAUSAL FACTORS (Office of the Inspector General of the Department of Defense 2005):
- Failure to follow/improper application of established DoD procedures and regulatory guidance
- Abuse of Power
- *Lack of Oversight*

RATIONALE:  While this case study does indicate that cultural issues existed in the acquisitions process, the number of individuals involved is so small and competing interests and individual motivations so varied that extrapolation of greater trends may be irresponsible.  The case study should not be included to determine relevant contributing factors applicable throughout the Air Force.

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